

Name of Program: Shattering Stigma: Menstruation

Target Audience: all students

Strategy for Implementation:

-Group discussion with facilitation to deepen and support, but not “lead”

Time of Year to Implement:

Any time

Relevant Learning Goal:

Interpersonal Skills

Specific Lesson Outcomes:

Students will understand the natural process of menstruation, increase body literacy and body positivity, and analyze the stigma associated with this process. Students will dissect the ways stigma can harm outcomes for those who menstruate. Students will construct a positive and empowering mindset towards menstruation.

Purpose:

To educate IMSA students on a natural process of the human body in order to lessen stigma. This information is pertinent to healthy development, and stigma surrounding this topic can adversely affect the way people deal with menstruation.

Planning and Preparation:

- No cost

-Printed Moon Mandalas for the wing if you choose to incorporate that portion.

Preparation:

Read articles listed in preparation for discussion. Unfortunately not all the sources use gender neutral language, but please be mindful of addressing this right away if you are sharing direct quotes/articles with students.

Have articles printed/pulled up or annotate article highlights as needed.

Optional: print a moon mandala for each student (only relevant to students who menstruate)

Read this, as it discusses menstruation through an equity and human rights lens:
<https://www.unfpa.org/menstruationfaq>

Execution:

In male wings focus more on parts 1 and 2, In female wings, parts 2 - 3 will be more relevant.

IMPORTANT equity note to share before beginning: Do only women get periods? - No - Trans men and non binary people may also menstruate - Practice gender neutral language regarding menstruation. We will call those who have the anatomy to be able to menstruate - menstruators, and those who do not non-menstruators. Unfortunately not all the resources linked will use this language.

Part 1: What is Menstruation?

Briefly go over the physical aspects of the menstrual cycle and related symptoms. Let students know resources to find more information. This health education piece is not the main goal of this program, but we want to make sure everyone has a basic understanding before we go on.

Most of us are not health professionals, so feel free to use a graphic or explanation from a medical website. Although you may not be comfortable talking about this, the point of doing this is to reduce the overall discomfort regarding talking about periods, which requires talking about them. It's ok to share with your students that you are not confident or quite comfortable with this information, but you understand the value of increasing your comfort level.

Ask what students know about the physical aspects of periods.

Share this Basic Graphic and the below Quick Facts to make sure there is a baseline for discussion:

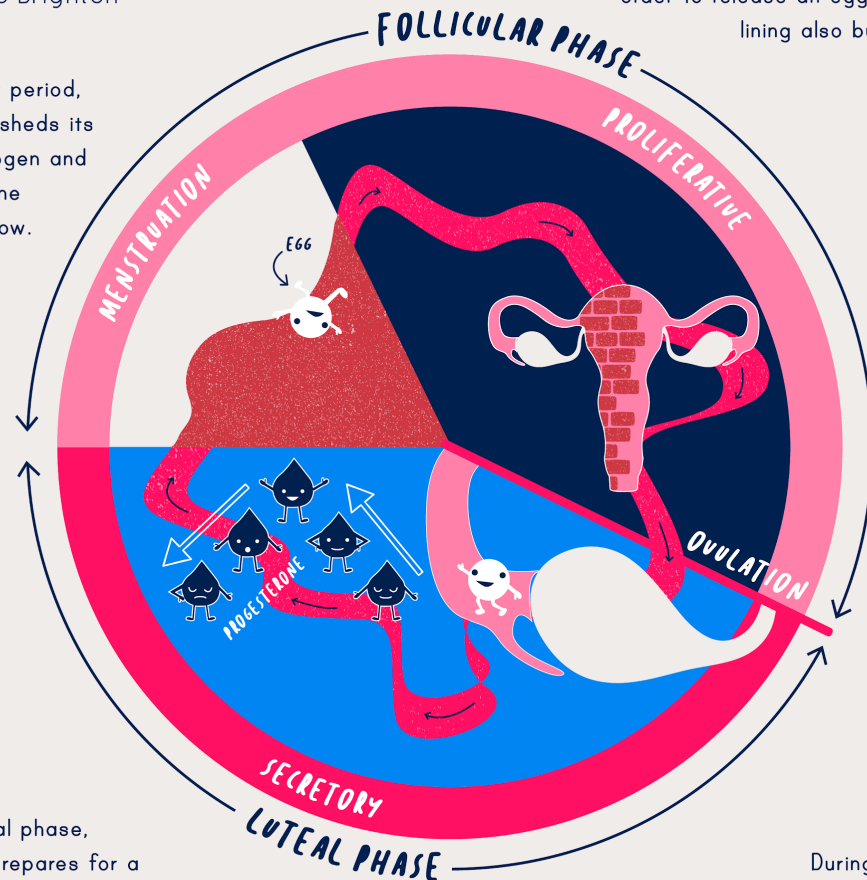
THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Dr. Jolene Brighten

During your period, the uterus sheds its lining. Estrogen and progesterone levels are low.

In the luteal phase, the body prepares for a possible pregnancy. Progesterone is highest in the luteal phase.

The proliferative phase is after your period. During which estrogen rises in order to release an egg. The uterine lining also builds back up.



During ovulation, an egg is released from the ovary, estrogen rises beforehand.

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Quick Facts:

Sources: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/10132-normal-menstruation>, <https://www.healthline.com/health/facts-statistics-menstruation#Menstrual-health-and-complications>

Cycle length (time from the start of one period to the start of the next) - 21 to 38 days, can be the same every month or vary; typically longer and more irregular at the start of menstruation

What age does menstruation start? - Anywhere from age 8 to 16, average 11 - 14 yrs

Period symptoms - some people experience these and some do not, both cases are normal

- Moodiness
- Trouble sleeping
- Food cravings
- Cramps in the lower abdomen and back
- Bloating
- Tenderness in the breasts
- Acne

Menstrual fluid (blood) loss - average of 2 - 5 tablespoons (less than most people think)

Part 2: Talking about period stigmas & misconceptions

Do not feel the need to make sure everything suggested is said by the students or yourself, but if students are stuck or you see a natural opening you may offer some of the possible responses.

Ask: Why it is important to talk about periods and what feelings and words are periods associated with?

Possible responses:

- De-stigmatize menstruation. Be more supportive and less stigmatizing
- Educate yourself on something half the world's population goes through
- For Non-menstruators: You may not have any understanding of the experience of what menstruation is. It often is a difficult experience, and you can benefit from empathizing with the menstruators in your life.

Ask: Why is there stigma in talking about periods? - Ask for personal examples of how people's families or friends talk about menstruation. What have any males or non-menstruating people in your life commented about periods?

Possible responses:

- Lack of education/knowledge especially for young non-menstruators
- A culture of "grossness"/ it's "dirty"
- Religious customs/references

Ask: How does this harm people?

Possible responses:

- Young people who menstruate may not get information about how to cope with menstruation even from the menstruators who raise them
- Non-menstruating people are not able to be a source of support for those who are new to menstruation because they are uninformed
- Lack of shedding light on important issues like people who do not have access to having a clean and healthy period
- Young menstruators missing or dropping out of school due to lack of proper care products
- Menstruators shamed for their period and kept in different areas than the rest of the family and not allowed to share food or utensils
- False belief that menstruators have diminished physical or emotional capacities - creates barriers to opportunities
- [“Tampon Tax”](#) - Only people who menstruate use menstrual hygiene products so the tax disproportionately affects those people.
 - In the United States, five states don’t charge sales tax, therefore don’t tax period products and many states have now exempted period products from sales taxes including Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania
 - There is a fun interactive map in the link above that shows which states don’t exempt period products but what kind of things they do exempt - eg. Missouri taxes tampons but not bingo supplies

Part 3: Talk about periods

Don’t call on anyone or make anyone talk as this can be uncomfortable for some while others will be very willing. The conversation may flow easily, but if it gets stuck try one of these questions:

- What do you believe to be true about menstruation?
- How do you feel about bleeding?
- What was your first period like?
- How would you like to feel about your period?
- How does it feel to look at your blood? - menstruator specific
- What might it look like to love having a period?

Assessment Questions:

- 1) What is something new you learned about periods?
- 2) In what ways does stigma around menstruation harm those who menstruate?
- 3) How can you be supportive of those who menstruate, whether that be yourself or someone else in your life?

References:

<https://www.unfpa.org/menstruationfaq> (This site is VERY useful!)

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/menstruation/art-20046004>

<https://thecastawaykitchen.com/2017/10/intro-mindful-menstruation-moon-mandala/>

<https://www.bloodandmilk.com/heres-how-menstrual-cycle-awareness-will-help-you-love-your-period/>

<https://www.bloodandmilk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Guide-to-a-Better-Period-CORA.pdf>

<https://www.bloodandmilk.com/why-we-need-to-teach-men-about-menstruation/>

<https://www.bloodandmilk.com/boys-who-bleed-why-gender-neutral-language-matters/>

Gender Neutral Menstruation:

<https://www.period.media/culture/gender-neutral-menstruating/>